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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001175

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SUBJECT: HAMAS LIKELY TO DOMINATE MEETING OF EU FOREIGN MINISTERS

REF: STATE 53022

Classified By: Political Officer Vincent Carver for reason 1.5 (b/d).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) Judith Gebetsroithner, an advisor to External Relations Commission Ferrero-Waldner, told us April 6 that discussion of Hamas would likely be the main issue for EU Foreign Ministers to tackle at their monthly meeting (GAERC) in Luxembourg April 10. Gebetsroithner noted that member states remain divided on how to handle Hamas, with France among those supporting a hard line of non-engagement. The GAERC will praise the Ukrainian elections as free and fair and likely extend its travel ban to 31 Belarusian officials. According to Gebetsroithner, there will be little discussion of Iran and no discussion on the Western Balkans. She added that "one large member state" is blocking additional EIB loans to Syria. END SUMMARY

12. (U) We presented points (ref) April 5 regarding the April 10 GAERC to Judith Gebetsroithner, advisor to External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and Margarita Comamala of the Council Secretariat. Gebetsroithner provided us April 6 the following reactions:

MEPP: HOW TO HANDLE HAMAS WILL DOMINATE DISCUSSION

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13. (C) Member states remain divided over how to handle Hamas and will review the issue at a closed-door lunch at the GAERC. France and a number of other member states are taking a hard-line approach and continue to insist that Hamas meet the international community's three conditions for engagement. Other member states are reasoning that isolation will embolden hardliners within Hamas and make the situation worse. According to ambassadors to the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC), the EU is likely to suspend all non-humanitarian assistance to the PA April 10. The Council Secretariat's Director for the Middle East told us separately

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that the EU does not want to antagonize the Palestinian people. EU High Rep Solana told the European Parliament April 5 that, "until Hamas shows unequivocal willingness to respect the international community's principles, we cannot do business as usual with the PA." Solana reiterated, however that the EU would, "continue its aid for the Palestinian people."

UKRAINIAN ELECTIONS: FREE AND FAIR;
WAIT AND SEE ON COALITION

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14. (C) The GAERC will praise the conduct of the Ukrainian elections and will voice support for a coalition government should one be formed by April 10. Gebetsroithner noted news reports that Yushchenko and Tymoshenko had agreed to form a government, adding wryly that it will be interesting to see how long such a coalition government lasts regardless of who becomes prime minister.

BELARUS: TRAVEL BAN EXTENSION TO 31 OFFICIALS

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15. (C) The GAERC will extend the EU's travel ban to 31 additional Belarusian officials, including President Lukashenko. FMs will also condemn the continued detention of political prisoners, characterizing the jail sentence for the former Polish Ambassador to Belarus as "the last straw" for some member states. The EU, however, has not reached a consensus on freezing assets of Belarusian officials, but member states have asked the Commission to prepare recommendations for PSC review.

16. BALKANS: OFF THE AGENDA;
FMs SUPPORT GIVING SERBIA ANOTHER MONTH TO ARREST MLADIC

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16. (C) According to Gebetsroithner, there will be no discussion of the Western Balkans. An advisor to Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn told us April 6 that Rehn had informed EU FMs that ICTY Chief Prosecutor had received a valuable "new type" of information that could lead to the arrest of

Mladic in the coming weeks. Our contact said that FMs had expressed support of Rehn's decision to provide Serbia another month before deciding whether to postpone subsequent political-level SAA negotiations with Belgrade.

IRAN: LITTLE DISCUSSION EXPECTED

17. (C) FMs may reiterate support for the UNSC and IAEA actions on Iran but likely will not discuss Iranian nuclear activities in detail. Gebetsroithner suggested that several member states are not yet ready to explore concrete measures they might take against Iran should Tehran continue its record of non-compliance with its international obligations.

LEBANON/SYRIA: ONE MEMBER STATE OPPOSING
ADDITIONAL EIB LOANS TO DAMASCUS

18. (C) EU officials (but not including Austrian FM Plassnik and Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, who will depart Luxembourg following a Cooperation Council meeting with Moldova) will meet a Lebanese delegation for an Association Council meeting the afternoon of April 11. The EU will voice support for Lebanon's territorial integrity and reiterate its call for Syrian cooperation with the Hariri assassination investigation. Gebetsroithner noted that, while Syria is not on the GAERC agenda, one "large" member state has noted clearly that it will oppose additional EIB loans to Damascus.

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